

## Food Labels are my Lifeline to Better Health!

"I was diagnosed with Celiac Disease in 2004 and confirmed the diagnosis in 2005. Celiac disease is an autoimmune disease of the small intestine where the body does not process gluten, a protein molecule found in wheat, rye, barley and un-pure oats. There is no surgery, medication or cure. The disease causes many complications including malnutrition, osteoporosis, other allergies, neuropathy, intestinal cancer, etc. Before diagnosis I was well on my way to developing cancer", said Becki Brooks, an employee in the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth.

The only way to fight this disease is by following a strict 'gluten free' (GF) diet. By doing so, she has gained weight for the first time in nearly 8 years, started absorbing nutrients and is able to enjoy life again by riding bikes, walking, coaching her son's soccer teams, etc. Becki went on to say, "I've changed my outlook on food & how it effects the body - the diet is no longer challenging but an adventure. I've found ways to have the same foods I use to enjoy by changing and creating healthier recipes".

"As of 2006, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires products containing wheat, milk, soy, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish or eggs to say so in plain English on the product's label. By August 2008, the FDA will also issue a standard definition of "gluten-free" to make it easier for shoppers with celiac disease to identify products". [www.mayoclinic.com/health/celiac-disease/DS00319](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/celiac-disease/DS00319)

Becki also said that the new laws put forth by FDA are not perfect but do help identify GF foods. According to the FDA the amount of gluten that can be in food and still be listed as GF is "20 parts per million". The FDA is working to change the ways allergens are labeled on food products and other non-food products. Only the 8 major allergens are currently listed on food labels. Wheat is one and although Celiac is not an allergy, it does help identify more products that are GF. As we read labels carefully we will see that manufactures are using the statement "processed in a facility that also processes ..." which may cause cross-contamination and exposure to allergens not directly found in products.



Becki helps to educate as many people as she can about the disease whether it's a fund raising activity for her son's school, a family get together, co-workers, legislatures, etc. The more people are educated the better they understand. Right now only 3% of people are diagnosed; 1 in 133 individuals have the disease. In her workplace there are approximately 150 staff - Becki is the one with Celiac.

**Thanks for the opportunity to share. "With patience and a little creativity one can eat and enjoy".**

**Becki Brooks**, Department of Labor & Economic Growth

Resources on Celiac Disease:

[www.celiaccentral.org/What\\_is\\_Celiac\\_/13/](http://www.celiaccentral.org/What_is_Celiac_/13/)

[www.csaceliacs.org/CD.php](http://www.csaceliacs.org/CD.php)

[www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/celiac-disease/celiac-diseaseFDA - Top 8 Allergens](http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/celiac-disease/celiac-diseaseFDA-Top8Allergens)

[www.mayoclinic.com/health/food-allergies/AA00057](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/food-allergies/AA00057)